

VLR-9/12/01 NRHP-4/1/02

U. S. Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM**

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

**1. Name of Property**

Historic Name The Almshouse Farm at Machipongo

Other Names/Site Number The Barrier Islands Center VDHR file # 065-0053

**2. Location**


Street & Number 12402 Lankford Highway not for publication N/A

City or Town Machipongo vicinity N/A

State Virginia Code VA County Northampton Code 131 Zip 23405

**3. State/Federal Agency Certification**

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide X locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments. )

 2/12/02  
Signature of Certifying Official Date

Virginia Department of Historic Resources  
State of Federal Agency and Bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register Criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments. )

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of commenting or other official Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
State or Federal Agency and Bureau

**4. National Park Service Certification**

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- Entered in the National Register
- See continuation sheet
- Determined eligible for the National Register
- See continuation sheet
- Determined not eligible for the National Register
- Removed from the National Register
- Other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Keeper

Date of Action \_\_\_\_\_

### 5. Classification

Ownership of Property (Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☒ private  
☐ public-local  
☐ public-State  
☐ public-Federal

Category of Property (Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)  
☐ district  
☐ site  
☐ structure  
☐ object

Number of Resources within Property

Contributing	Noncontributing
<u>5</u>	<u>0</u> buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u> objects
<u>5</u>	<u>0</u> Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register N/A

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

N/A

### 6. Function of Use

Historic Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Domestic  
Domestic

Sub: Institutional Housing  
Single Dwelling

Current Functions (Enter categories from instructions)

Cat: Work in Progress

Sub: Work in Progress

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**7. Description**

Architectural Classification (Enter categories from instructions)

Mid-Nineteenth Century – Greek Revival

Colonial

Other: No Style

Materials (Enter categories from instructions)

Foundation - Brick

Roof - Brick

Walls - Wood

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Narrative Description (Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

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**8. Statement of Significance**

Applicable National Register Criteria (Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- ☒ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations (Mark "X" in all boxes that apply)

- ☐ A Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B Removed from its original location.
- ☐ C A birthplace or a grave.
- ☐ D A cemetery.
- ☐ E A reconstructed building, object or structure.
- ☐ F A commemorative property.
- ☐ G Less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Areas of Significance (Enter Categories from instructions)

Architecture and Social History

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Period of Significance

1725 to 1951

Significant Dates

Ca. 1725

Ca. 1840

1910

**The Almshouse Farm at Machipongo  
Northampton County, VA**

Significant Person (Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Architect: W. G. Dondelton; Builder: David A. Dunton

Narrative Statement of Significance (Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets)

Previous documentation on file (NPS)

☐ Preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested

☐ Previously listed in the National Register

☐ Previously determined eligible by the National Register

☐ Designated a National Historic Landmark

☐ Recorded by Historic American Building Survey # \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

Primary Location of Additional Data

☒ State Historic Preservation Office

☐ Other State agency

☐ Federal agency

☐ Local government

☐ University

☐ Other

Name of repository: \_\_\_\_\_

**10. Geographical data**

Acreage of Property 17.893 acres

UTM References (Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

	Zone	Easting	Northing	Zone	Easting	Northing
1	18	419860	4140060	2	18	420080 4139980
3	18	419680	4139660	4	18	419620 4139700

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet)

**The Almshouse Farm at Machipongo  
Northampton County, VA**

**11. Form Prepared By**

Name/Title: Richard S. Funk, Ph.D., Assistant Director

Organization: The Eastern Shore of Virginia Barrier Islands Center, Inc. Date: May 2001

Street & Number 12402 Lankford Highway, P.O. Box 206 Telephone (757) 678-5550

City or Town Machipongo State: VA Zip Code: 23405

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

- A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- A sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources

Photographs

- Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

Name: The Eastern Shore of Virginia Barrier Islands Center, Inc.

Street & Number 12402 Lankford Highway Telephone (757) 678-5550

City or Town Machipongo State VA Zip Code 23405

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U. S. C. 470 et. Seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018, Washington, DC 20503).

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**7. Narrative Description**

**Summary Description**

The Almshouse Farm at Machipongo, a part of the old Northampton County Almshouse Farm, is comprised of three contributing buildings situated on a flat, 17.893-acre site. Of the three buildings, one is known to have been built in 1910. The other two are estimated to have been built ca. 1725 and ca. 1840. The oldest of the three buildings is a one-and-one-half story structure built in two parts, one brick and one frame, and joined together. It probably predates the almshouse use of the property. The main building on the site is a ca. 1840 frame, two-story building in the vernacular Greek Revival style that housed residents of the almshouse farm. The 1910 building is a one-story frame building in a form resembling that of one-story frame school buildings from the same period. It was constructed as the almshouse for African-Americans. There are two small, frame, late-19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup>-century outbuildings remaining. Both were used as sheds and both are contributing resources. Broad lawns surround the structures and there are large ash trees on the west and east sides of the 1840 building. Juniper bushes form a dense hedge separating the buildings from the highway and from the large cultivated fields that surround the site. The complex is prominently sited along U.S. Route 13, the main north-south thoroughfare on Virginia's Eastern Shore.

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**Detailed Descriptions**

**Building #1 – Ca. 1725 building (“Quarter Kitchen”)**

The ca. 1725 building is presumed to be a farmhouse structure that predates the almshouse occupation of the site. It consists of two small, joined structures, one brick and the other wood frame. Each section features a one-room-and attic plan – what has been called a “Hall house,” or a “Quarter kitchen.” The brick section, 18 feet 2 inches wide by 20 feet 1 inch long, was built first. In *Virginia's Eastern Shore* (1968), Ralph T. Whitelaw identifies the brick portion as “possibly being the first home built by Thomas Powell” after his purchase of 375 acres in 1683 from William Whittington. The wood frame section was added later. It is 17 feet 11 inches wide by 20 feet 2 inches long with pine clapboard siding, painted white.

Both sections sit on brick foundations under one roof, a single-pitch roof of 45 degrees covered with wood shingles. Each section of the building has one small, flush-plank door on the south elevation. The wood frame section has a flush plank door on the north elevation and a small six-pane window with louvred shutters. The brick building originally had a door opening on the east end, but it was bricked in at some previous time and replaced with window.

The floors in each section are of pine plank construction, added after the original buildings were constructed. There are fireplaces of brick construction in each section. Both are located on the west elevation of the structures. In the southeast corner of each room there is a stair, 25 inches wide, that leads to the attic.

**Brick Structure**

The bricks used in construction are large, averaging 8 ¾ inches by 4 1/8 inches by 3 ½ inches and are laid in a Flemish Bond pattern. There is a height of 20 inches between ground level and the water table of the brick pattern. The distance from the water table to the eaves is 7 feet 6 inches. There are three, small, six-pane windows on the first floor and one four-pane window in the attic. There is a brick chimney, 24 feet high, abutted by the partition of the frame wing. The chimney measures 9 feet 6 inches at the base, rising six feet at that width, narrowing to three feet wide within a distance of 7 feet 6 inches. The chimney continues at three feet wide the remainder of the height. The fireplace formerly had an opening of 6 feet 10 inches, and the mantle shelf was some five feet above the hearth.

**Wood Structure**

The wood structure sits on a brick foundation. The distance between the foundation and the eaves is eight feet. There are two, small, six -pane windows on the first floor and one small, four-pane window in the attic. The siding is pine clapboard, eight inches wide. There is plain pine corner and eaves trim.

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There is a brick chimney 20 feet high on the west elevation. The chimney measures 6 feet 10 inches at the base, rising 8 feet 8 inches at that width, narrowing to three feet wide within a distance of 34 inches. The chimney width continues at three feet the remainder of the height. The fireplace formerly had an opening of five feet, and the mantle shelf was some four feet above the hearth.

**Building #2 – Almshouse– ca. 1840**

The main building at the almshouse farm is a representative example of simple vernacular Greek Revival architecture. It was built in a symmetrical layout with generous axial corridors centered on four terminating doors on the first floor and a single corridor terminating at windows on the second floor. The seven-bay building measures 63 feet 5 inches long by 36 feet 3 inches wide and is two and one-half stories high. There are five doors and 39 windows on the exterior. The main entry on the west elevation is sheltered by a three-bay porch with simple rail and wood trim and a standing-seam metal roof. The porch measures 24 feet 2 inches long by 7 feet 11 inches wide by 10 feet 8 inches high, with a 7 foot 5 inch opening for the steps. The clapboard siding is painted pine, 5 ½ inches wide. The structure has a slate gable roof with cornices. Four chimneys, symmetrically located, are visible on the roof.

The building sits on a brick foundation, 35 inches high, with a crawl space with wooden slatted vents. There are eight rooms on the first floor and 13 rectangular “guestrooms” on the second floor. Most of the windows are six-over-six double hung sash. On both the front and rear, paired windows in the central bay feature four-over-four sash. Some louvred shutters remain, but most of the windows do not have shutters. The floors are horizontal wood planks. The interior hallways feature vertical beaded-board wainscoting, 37 inches high, with plain baseboard and cap trim. There are plaster walls and ceilings. At the attic level at either end of the building is a pair of narrow four-over-four paned windows the top frames of which form a pointed-arch.

**First Floor**

The first floor has axial corridors, or central cross hallways measuring 5 feet 8 inches wide running north to south and 8 feet 3 inches wide running east to west. The hallways end at terminating doors. The east and west doors are 36 inches wide with three-pane sidelights, for an overall width of 6 feet 2 inches. There is a three-pane transom over each door. The north and south terminating doors have three-pane transoms. There are eight rooms on the first floor. Four of the rooms have fireplaces, but only one is open. The other three have been bricked in. The open fireplace measures 49 inches wide by 37 inches high, with no trim and a simple mantle shelf. All of the hallways have 37-inch-high beaded wainscoting with plain baseboard and cap trim. All of the doors on the first floor are wood with raised panels. The plaster ceilings are 12 feet high. There is a 36-inch wide stairway with simple turned balusters and newels connecting the first and second floors. The first-floor rooms probably provided living space for the almshouse superintendent and family as well as public rooms for the farm’s residents.



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**Second Floor**

The second floor has one hallway, 5 feet 8 inches wide, running north to south. There are 13 guestrooms opening onto the hall. Each room measures 7 feet 10 inches wide by 14 feet 3 inches long with a raised-panel door topped by a three-light transom. The hallway has 37-inch high beaded wainscoting with plain baseboard and cap trim. The plaster ceilings are 12 feet high.

**Building #3 – Almshouse for African-Americans - 1910**

The 1910 almshouse is a single-story frame building representative of late-19th-century/early-20th-century institutional architecture. It resembles small country schools of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It measures 28 feet 6 inches wide by 78 feet 4 inches long, and has a symmetrical plan with generous, wide, axial corridors centered on terminating doors. The building was constructed in a T-cross hall plan and contains ten "guestrooms" and one "day" room. The building sits on a brick foundation, 24 inches high, with a crawl space. The exterior pine clapboard siding is 4 ¾ inches wide painted white. The plain corner trim and eaves are pine. The hipped roof is covered with slate tile and metal ridge covers.

The main entrance appears to be through the day room at the end of the west elevation. Seven brick chimneys are a part of the plan and are visible on the steeply-pitched, hipped roof. One serves the day room. The first guestroom on each side of the hall moving from west-to-east had its own chimney. The next two guestrooms shared a chimney, as did the last two rooms. There are four raised-panel doors on the exterior and 16 six-over-six, double-hung windows with exterior louvred shutters.

The building has pine plank floors, plaster walls and ceilings, and pine beaded-board wainscoting, 36 inches high, capped with plain pine trim throughout. The first guestrooms on either side of the hall had their own heating stove. The next four rooms on either side were heated by stoves piped into party wall chimneys.

There is one window in each of the guestrooms, except the two east guestrooms, which have two windows. There are no windows in the central hall. Each guestroom opens onto the hall and measures 9 feet 2 inches by 9 feet 6 inches and has one plain, raised-panel door with a two-pane transom for air circulation and light. The "day" room measures 17 feet 6 inches wide by 27 feet 9 inches long. The ceilings are 9 feet 4 inches high throughout. The east-west hallway is 7 feet 10 inches wide and 49 feet long with one plain, raised-panel door at the east end. The north-south cross-hallway is 9 feet 4 inches wide and 27 feet long with plain, raised-panel doors at the north and south ends.

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**Other Buildings on the Site**

There are two outbuildings on the almshouse farm property. One is a frame shed, painted white, 10 feet by 10 feet with a wood-shingle roof and cedar clapboard siding. This building was constructed in the late 19<sup>th</sup> or early 20<sup>th</sup>-century. It was used to house the water pump after rural electrification. Prior to that it was probably used as a storage shed.

The second building is an unpainted, frame grain or storage shed. It was constructed in the late 19th century. It measures ten-feet wide by twenty-feet long and is of board-and-batten construction. It sits on concrete-filled drain tile piers at the corners and along the side. It has a tin roof and has wood doors on the north and south elevations.

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**8. Statement of Significance**

**Summary Statement of Significance**

The Almshouse Farm at Machipongo in Northampton County, Virginia, is a complex of buildings constructed to shelter the indigent and provide for their care. The main building, constructed ca.1840, is a rare surviving example of a simple vernacular, Greek Revival-style institutional dwelling. The other two buildings at the almshouse farm are a ca.1725 early colonial farm building probably constructed prior to the almshouse association with the property and a one-story frame almshouse for African-Americans built in 1910. The Northampton County Almshouse Farm was in continuous operation between 1803 and 1952. This complex of buildings at the Almshouse Farm at Machipongo are eligible for the National Register under Criterion A for Social History for their association with Northampton County's and the Commonwealth of Virginia's care of its indigent population in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The property is also eligible under Criterion C for architecture as a notable complex of buildings that retain their historical integrity for association, design, feeling, location, material, setting, and workmanship.

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**Historical Background**

During the colonial period in Virginia, the Church of England cared for the poor through the parish vestries. The vestries distributed part of the money collected by the church either to the poor directly as a form of relief, or to other persons paid to house and feed the poor or infirm.

In 1755 the Virginia House of Burgesses authorized the parishes to establish poorhouses, but few did so. By 1785 the Virginia General Assembly required each county to create a committee called "the overseers of the poor" to replace the parish vestry in that function. At first appointed and later elected, the overseer operated a poorhouse, bound out orphans and illegitimate children as apprentices, and accounted for the funds they distributed for the care of the poor. Gradually the idea of concentrating the poor in workhouses or poorhouses gained acceptance, particularly among the overseers, as a cost-effective means of caring for and controlling the poor and infirm.

Each parish in Virginia had a farm and house (a glebe) set aside for use by the minister. After disestablishment of the Church of England, the General Assembly enacted laws that authorized localities to sell the glebe lands belonging to the parishes and apply the proceeds to the care of the poor. If the parish still had a rector, however, the sale could not take place until after his death.

The concept of the poorhouse developed by the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries from popular assumptions about the nature of poverty and the character of the poor. Every citizen, it was thought, had an obligation to work, to support himself, and to cultivate the discipline and habits that would enable him to be a productive member of society. Those who did not work and fell into poverty were categorized as "deserving" or "undeserving" of public charity. The deserving poor were those who could not work, whether because of age, physical disability, or mental condition.

The undeserving poor were perceived as too lazy to work (vagrants and idlers) or in the grip of such vices as drunkenness or "dissipation." Living in poorhouses might help both groups: the deserving poor would be protected and the undeserving might be reformed.

Alternatives to the poorhouse existed but were viewed as less effective in the desired results. If the poor were left at home and given a cash dole they might spend it unwisely or on liquor. If the poor were themselves doled out to private citizens to be cared for, and the money given to the caretakers, they would have no incentive to improve themselves. Only by collecting the poor in one place, housing them, and putting them to work to provide at least some of their own subsistence could the deserving be helped and the undeserving rehabilitated.

The first record of any action toward the erection of a building to house the poor in Northampton County

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appears in the minutes of the Hungars Parish vestry meeting of October 23, 1767. Thirty days later it was ordered:

That the present Churchwardens and their successors do purchase a Tract of Land not exceeding one hundred Acres and that they be empowered to borrow money to pay for the same in order to build a house for the reception of the Poor of this Parish. (Whitelaw, p. 326)

A levy of twenty thousand pounds of tobacco was approved for the purpose. The subject was mentioned several times in later vestry meetings, but apparently nothing further was actually done before the Revolutionary War.

In 1802 the Court of Northampton County "(a)ppointed Littleton Savage, Peter Bowdoin, Isaac Smith, John Eyre and Nathaniel Holland, Gentlemen, or any three of them, to be a Committee to consider the propriety of erecting a Poor House for this County, and that they make a report thereon to the first day of the next court."

On February 8, 1803 the Northampton County Court met to consider erecting a poorhouse. The Court appointed William Satchell, Thomas Parramore, Jr., Richard Dunton, or any two of them to purchase a piece of land, not to exceed \$1,200, for the construction of a poor house. The court directed:

(t)hat on the said piece of Land so to be purchased there be built a house of brick forty feet long by thirty feet wide in the clear two story high; the building of which shall be let out by the said Commission in such manner as they shall think proper, and to be finished upon such Plan and in such manner as they shall direct; and that the said Commissioners Shall have the power to borrow for and on behalf of the County from Time to Time as they shall deem necessary, any sum or sums of money Not exceeding in the whole the sum of One Thousand pounds, for the Purpose of carrying this order into effect. (Whitelaw, p. 327)

On October 9, 1803, William and Grace Eyre deeded 51 ½ acres to Northampton County for \$1,200, the acres being the northeast corner of their "Hungars Plantation."

The building authorized by the Order of the Northampton County Court was completed in 1804. William Satchell, who lived not far away and may have been the builder, was appointed overseer for the first year. When the original building was burned or otherwise destroyed, or exactly when the present one was built, has not yet been determined.

**"Condition of the Poor"**

In 1829 the General Assembly passed an act requiring each locality to report to the state auditor of public

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accounts on the condition of the poor since 1800. When asked to perform a search, the Reference section at the Library of Virginia could not find a report from Northampton County on the condition of the poor.

Records from individual "supervisors," "overseers," or "superintendents" of the almshouse for Northampton County have not been located. However, United States Census data for 1850, 1860, 1870, 1880, and 1900 provide some information about the overseers and numbers of residents at the almshouse farm.

**1850** - The Overseer was Elijah Brittingham who resided there with his wife Margaret. There were thirty people enumerated. Twenty-two were white and eight were black. Twenty residents were female between the ages of 6 and 78 and 12 were males ranging in age from 3 to 73.

**1860** - The Overseer was William Brickhouse. A total of ten people were enumerated. All were white. There were six white females and four white males. The females ranged in age from 12 to 50 and the male residents were between the ages of 6 and 60.

**1870** - The Overseer was not identified separately. A total of 30 people were enumerated. Seventeen were white and 13 were black. There were 19 females ranging in age from 3 to 80, and 11 males ranging in age from 9 to 90.

**1880** - The Overseer was John T. Bell who resided at the almshouse farm with his wife Emily and their son, Theron. Twenty people—eight males and 14 females—were enumerated. There were 18 whites and four blacks. Females ranged in age from 4 to 75 and the males ranged in age from 61 to 95.

**1900** - The Overseer was William G. Bell who resided at the almshouse farm with his wife, Rose and their niece, Carrie. Sixteen people—seven males and eight females—were enumerated. There were 11 blacks and five whites. The females ranged in age from 20 to 85 and the males ranged in age from 14 to 70.

**The Land**

The original 51 ½ acres for the almshouse farm was increased as Northampton County acquired additional acres through a series of land purchases. In 1835, the County acquired seven acres from William Lyttleton Savage and 99 acres was acquired from Savage in 1840. In 1926 the almshouse farm was listed as being 120 acres (James, p.64). The Supervisors also sold off land. For example, in 1908, the Supervisors sold land determined to be surplus. The land sold was sold as individual building lots. Records show that the almshouse farm did not always have tillable crops. During 1952, the County Supervisors sold timber and received cash from the sales.

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**Property Ownership**

The land associated with the Almshouse Farm at Machipongo has a long history beginning with land patents from the King of England. The farm is situated on land patented in 1634 to William Stone. The following is a documented time-line of the property's ownership history:

- 1635 Petition granted for 1800 acres to William Stone
- 1647 William Stone sold a neck of land to Robert Phillips and William Taylor
- 1648 Phillips and Taylor sold the land to William Whittington
- 1683 William Whittington sold 375 acres to Thomas Powell
- 1690 Thomas and Mary Powell sold the acreage to Sara Palmer
- 1692 Sara Palmer deeded the 375 acres to John Matthews
- 1717 John Matthews gave the 375 acres to his son, John Custis Matthews
- 1736 John Custis Matthews sold 350 acres to Littleton Eyre
- 1768 Littleton Eyre left the 350 acres (his "Hungars Plantation") to his son, Severn Eyre
- 1773 Severn Eyre left the 350 acres to his son, Severn Eyre, Jr.
- 1787 Severn Eyre, Jr. left the land to his younger brother William Eyre
- 1803 William and Grace Eyre sold 51 ½ acres to Northampton County for \$1,200
- 1952 Northampton County sold, at auction, the original 51 ½ acres to Edward F. and Clyde E. Gibb for \$14,000 (October 20, 1952).
- 1999 Devlin Barrett and Betsy Ann Gibb sold 17.893 acres, and buildings, to The Eastern Shore of Virginia Barrier Islands Center, Inc. for \$100,000 (August 17, 1999).

**The Buildings**

Neither Ralph Whitelaw nor Chandlee Forman, both chroniclers of the Eastern Shore's early buildings, nor the VDHR can ascribe an exact date of construction to the ca. 1725 building. Most likely it predates the almshouse use of the site and was later used as a support structure to the almshouse farm. Mrs. Jane (Underhill) Tankard, a resident of the almshous farm between 1938 and 1950, reported that the ca. 1725 building was used as a kitchen and for slaughtering and rendering hogs. Mrs. Tankard's grandfather, J. B. Underhill, and father, G. W. Underhill, were almshouse supervisors. She also reported that there was a chicken house, a barn, various other outbuildings, and a cemetery on the premises.

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Both black and white indigent citizens were housed in the farm's buildings, although always segregated. Funds were appropriated by the Board of Supervisors in 1909 for an "almshouse for coloreds," after an inspection of the farm premises revealed that the "quarters for colored people was found in bad condition and in need of immediate repair." In 1910 a separate almshouse for African-Americans was built. After 1910 the buildings were well maintained and offered shelter to individuals and families unable to live on their own or unable to support themselves.

No information has been found to document the construction history of the ca. 1840 main building at the almshouse farm.

**More Recent History**

In 1926 the State Board of Public Welfare published a report entitled "The Disappearance of the County Almshouse in Virginia: Back from 'Over the Hill.'" The report discussed the history of the local poorhouse from its colonial origin to the early twentieth century and concluded that the poor could be better and more economically cared for in a system of district homes. Some thirty-three localities had closed their poorhouses by 1926, and only 1,243 inmates remained in the one hundred poorhouses still open. The report credited many of the poorhouse superintendents with genuine concern and kindness toward the inmates, but concluded that age and inefficiency had overwhelmed the system.

The district home concept did not catch on throughout the state. However, in 1915 Northampton County had the Almshouse Farm with a "Superintendent of the Poor," George E. Roberts, and also had two "Overseers of the Poor," J. P. Widgeon for the Eastville District and W. A. Copes who oversaw the poor in the Capeville District. There must certainly have been district homes, because on July 5, 1915 the Northampton County Board of Supervisors paid 12 people between \$4.50 and \$6.00 for "support of the poor to October 1, 1915."

Even with the district homes in operation, the Almshouse Farm itself remained open until 1952, when it was sold at auction as surplus property. Many people in Accomack and Northampton Counties still have living relatives who resided at the Almshouse Farm.

Since the Almshouse Farm at Machipongo was in operation for almost 150 years, there are many stories associated with the residents. One particularly sad story involves the "Superintendent of the Poor" of Northampton as printed in the "Peninsular Enterprise" of August 17, 1895:



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**Suicide of Northampton Man**

Mr. Edward B. Doughty, of Machipongo, superintendent of the poor of Northampton, left his house at the usual hour on Monday morning to feed his stock, and not returning as early as was expected, a member of his family went in search of him, to find him dead in the cornstack with a bullet hole in his head. It was seen, as soon as he was discovered, that he had killed himself, and a verdict to that effect later in the day was returned by a coroner's jury. His own pistol with one chamber empty was found by his side and told the sad tale. Why he killed himself, of course is only a matter of conjecture. We are informed, he had a happy family and was not involved financially, and that the only reason given for the act is that, being in bad health, while temporarily insane, he killed himself. His wife and three children survive him.

Over the years in Virginia, many poor farm structures were demolished and the land converted to other uses. The Northampton County Almshouse Farm at Machipongo, created some 148 years ago, and with surviving buildings dating from ca. 1725, ca. 1840, and 1910, remains a rare reminder of the almshouse farm era.

The buildings are now owned by the Barrier Islands Center of Virginia. The main building is being rehabilitated for the center's visitor center and as exhibit space.

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**10. Geographical Data**

A National Geodetic Survey Marker (#P418, FW0218) is located across the road from the Almshouse Farm which can provide exact Longitude and Latitude coordinates.

National Geodetic Survey Marker  
P418, PID – FW0218  
37° 24' 12" N  
075° 54' 10" W

**Verbal Property Description**

The Almshouse Farm at Machipongo is identified as parcel 21 on tax map 40-21A of the tax parcel maps for Northampton County, Virginia.

**Boundary Justification**

The nominated acreage contains the existing buildings formerly associated with the Northampton County Almshouse Farm and constitutes the 17.893 acres of the Almshouse Farm buildings and surrounding land now owned by The Eastern Shore of Virginia Barrier Islands Center, Inc., at Machipongo, VA.

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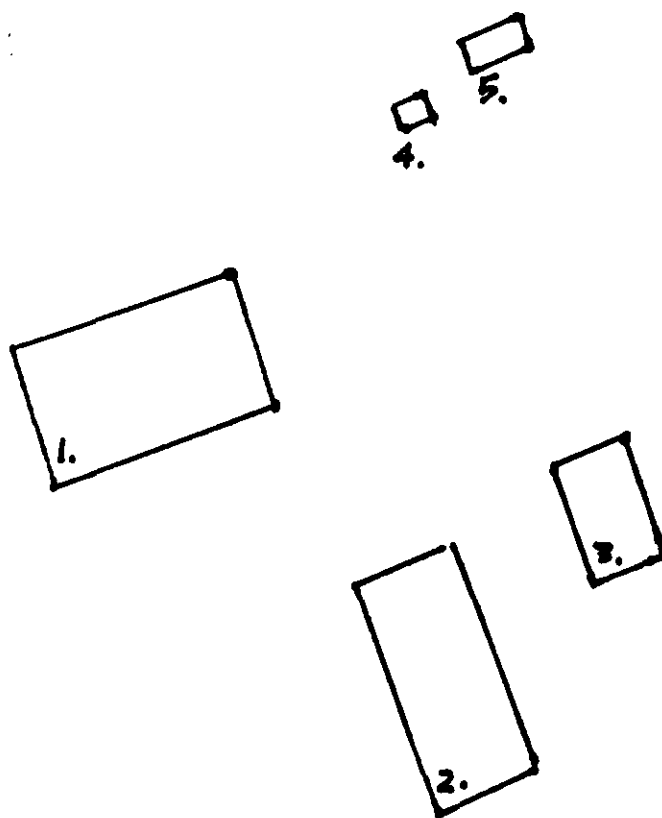
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Sections Sketch Map

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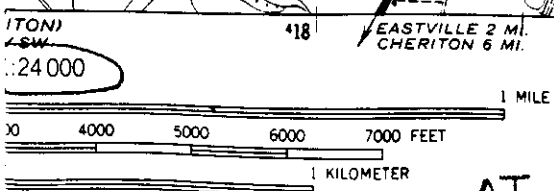
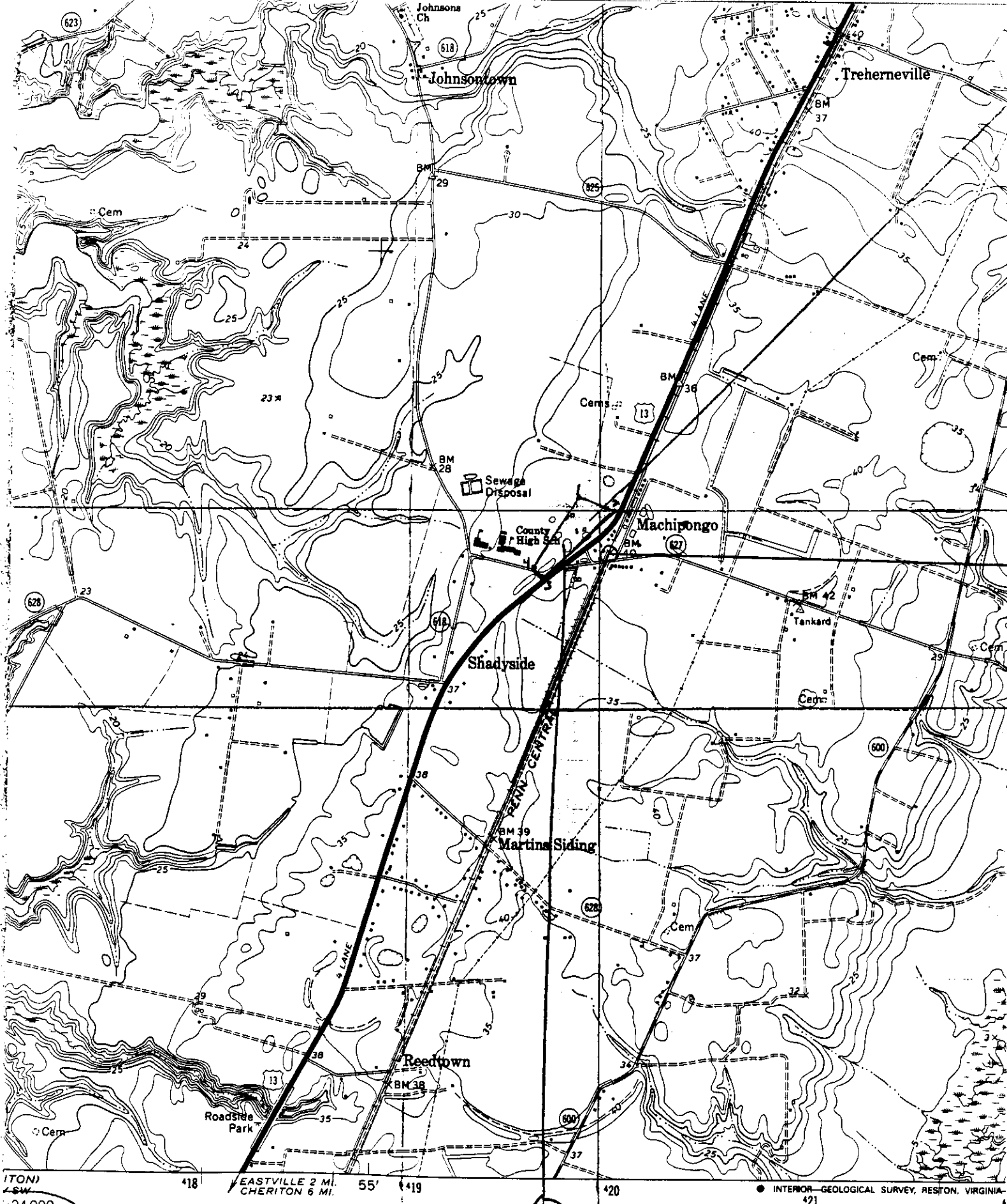


1. Ca. 1840 Almshouse
2. 1910 Almshouse for African-American
3. Ca. 1725 Building ("Quarter Kitchen")
4. Shed (Mid 19<sup>th</sup> to Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century)
5. Shed (Mid 19<sup>th</sup> to Early 20<sup>th</sup> Century)



SKETCH MAP  
- not to scale -

U.S. ROUTE 13



ALMSHOUSE FARM  
AT MACHIPONGO

ROAD CLASSIFICATION

Primary highway, all weather, hard surface	Light-duty road, improved surface
Secondary highway, all weather, hard surface	Unimproved road weather